



# THE WONDER OF GOD'S WORD

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® THE WONDER OF GOD'S WORD

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# HELP FROM BEYOND THE MOUNTAIN

A story is told of a mountain climber who adventured into his all-too-familiar terrain up a steep mountain. A faint path seemed to lead him upwards. As he ascended, the path became steeper, and the loose gravel on the rocky face made for a treacherous climb. After many hours of carefully calculated steps, he was shocked to learn that the path he was following had petered out. There was no possibility of retracing his steps as the gravel on the rocks was too loose to guarantee his safety. Panic engulfed him as he found himself on the threshold of dangerous footing.

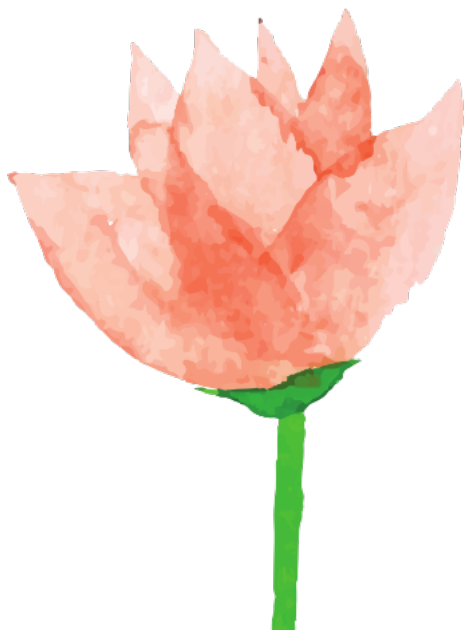
It is said that if you can't go forward, you may as well retreat to safety. Retreating to re-strategize seemed like a great idea, but he was stuck. There was no one to help him. No one but God.

So, he prayed: "God, help me!" Suddenly a thought came into his mind, "Climb higher." Going uphill seemed very risky but he decided to trust the still small voice. Slowly and steadily he climbed higher, one step at a time. Before he knew it, he was at the top of the mountain. He looked ahead and noticed that the opposite side of the mountain had a grassy slope that was a lot safer and easier to descend from. The still small voice had led him to safety.

We all have one thing in common with this mountain climber. Each one of us has had our share of difficulties and moments in life that seem helpless and hopeless. We have experienced uncertainty over what we cannot anticipate – whether it is natural calamities or illnesses, sudden losses or even death. These are moments of exasperated hope and blurred visions. These are moments where we most need direction and counsel.

It is in such moments that the cry of our heart, “Where does my help come from?” is sought and found. Like the Psalmist we can confidently say, “*My help comes from the Lord, who made heaven and earth*” (Psalm 121:2). The marvelous truth is this: the God who made the mountains and hills, the God who knows every cliff and curve, the God who put every rock in its place and counted the blades of grass, knows us, loves us and desires to communicate with us.

The Second Vatican Council decree, *Dei Verbum* (Latin for “Word of God”) affirms that God communicates with humanity in a variety of ways, such as through beauty and the order of creation, the liturgy and tradition, through the lives of saints and people and also through thoughtful reasoning and experiences of life. But one of the most profound ways God speaks to us is through His Word.





***“My help comes from the Lord,  
who made heaven and earth.”***

PSALM 121:2, NRSV





# CONTINUE THE LEGACY

Perhaps to understand this better we need to go back to the early Church and see how our forefathers assimilated and compiled the sacred Truth as it was handed down to them. The Holy Spirit gave birth to the Church on Pentecost Sunday around 30 AD. But the cradle Church had no Gospel except for verbal proclamation cascaded through loving memories that the apostles cherished of their Master and Lord. These disciples, entrusted with the mandate to 'Go Forth' with the Gospel, traveled from place to place establishing local Churches and communities where believers gathered weekly to celebrate the Eucharist. The disciples also set up liturgical rites and customs pertinent to the norm of that culture. They later appointed elders and bishops that served as leaders and were chosen to safeguard the *Apostolic tradition* drawing from the life, death and resurrection of Jesus Christ.



***And what you have heard from me  
through many witnesses entrust to  
faithful people who will be able to  
teach others as well.***

2 TIMOTHY 2:2, NRSV







Between 25 -70 AD, apostles and authors inspired by the Holy Spirit wrote letters which were compiled to form the Gospels (2 Timothy 3:16). It is out of these writings that the bishops compiled the Canon (or authoritative list) of inspired writings which then became accepted as the Word of God for the whole Church.

God gave the writers “Apostolic liberty of speech” (Providentissimus Deus) to write the Truth. This doctrine of dual-authorship and partnership teaches us that there is a Divine Author and a human author working together to give us the full Divine Truth. This makes the Bible not only credible but also authentic.

Whenever disputes arose within the Church regarding interpretation, doctrine, etc. the Holy Spirit inspired the bishops to call special meetings (synods, councils) to discuss and settle the disputed matters. Many central doctrines of Christian belief now contained in the Nicene Creed were formulated at the first seven Ecumenical Councils. This happened 700 years before the Protestant Reformation declared its new principle “*Sola Scriptura*” (scripture only).

The Church believes that the words of Jesus are fulfilled in the pastoral role of the bishops. The gathering of bishops from across the world, such as the Second Vatican Council ensures that such erroneous doctrine is continually investigated and prayerfully discerned and filtered. It is important to understand that the responsibility of the Gospel was not handed down to individual disciples but rather to a “Church” built on Peter and the apostles. Bishops were appointed by the apostles who imparted in them the same authoritative power through the laying of hands (2 Timothy 1:6).

It is this ‘living office’ - also called the Magisterium of the bishops, that has enabled Catholics for the last 2000 years to remain united under “One, Holy, Catholic and Apostolic” Church.





***“First of all you must understand this, that no prophecy of scripture is a matter of one’s own interpretation, because no prophecy ever came by human will, but men and women moved by the Holy Spirit spoke from God.”***

2 PETER 1:20-21, NRSV





# SOLA SCRIPTURA

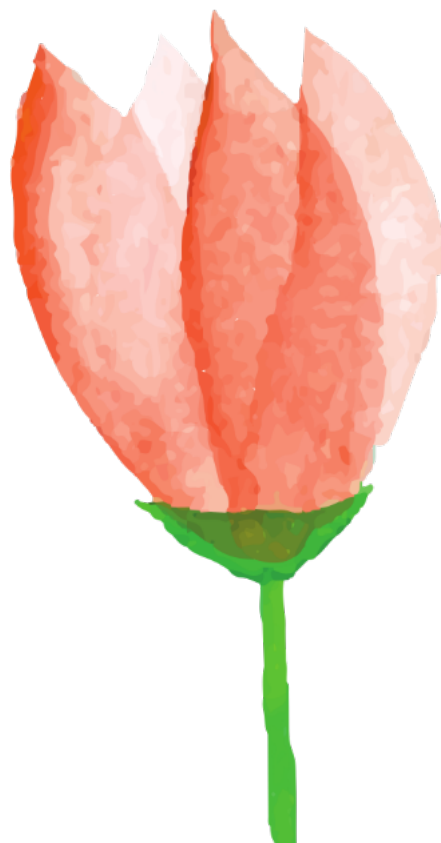
Is the Bible alone the sole and complete source for the Christian faith? This is often one of the most argued points between Catholic and non-Catholic Christians. The latter argues that while the Church, its pastors, and others help us to follow Christ and live the Christian faith, nothing and no one besides the Bible is necessary for salvation. In other words, the Bible alone is sufficient.

But looking back at history, we know that the first generation of believers did not have access to any Scriptures aside from the Old Testament. The compilation of the New Testament came about nearly two decades after Christ's death where the books were completed over a span of about fifty years. During this time, Christianity was based solely on tradition, i.e., the teachings that were passed down from Christ's apostles received from Jesus, or through divine revelation or inspiration.



It is over the years, the Teaching Authority (Magisterium) of the bishops in union with the Pope that discerned and deemed it important to consider both Sacred Tradition and Sacred Scripture as necessary components of our faith journey. It is the deposit of the Word of God that has been passed on (or transmitted) to us in writing (Sacred Scripture) and oral preaching (Sacred Tradition) from the apostles through their successors (the bishops). that makes for wholeness and a holistic faith experience.

Indeed, the Church holds the written Word of God in such high esteem, that she has painstakingly seen to it that it was preserved and handed on from generation to generation, all the way down to our own. The Church gives witness to the Word of God, that which has been handed on as Sacred Scripture and that which has been handed on as Sacred Tradition; faithfully teaching with the authority of Christ.



***Consequently, it is not from Sacred Scripture alone that the Church draws her certainty about everything which has been revealed. Therefore, both Sacred Tradition and Sacred Scripture are to be accepted and venerated with the same sense of loyalty and reverence.***

DEI VERBUM 9





# LECTIO DIVINA

Very often Catholics are perceived as ones with poor knowledge of scripture or as having not read the Bible enough. However, it was Catholic monks who developed the Lectio Divina form of prayer in the 6th century that teaches us how to read, meditate and respond to the Word of God. "*Lectio Divina*", a Latin term, which means "divine reading" describes a way of reading the Scriptures whereby, we gradually let go of our own agenda and open ourselves to what God wants to say to us.

It consists of four phases:

1. *Lectio* (Read)

Pick your passage and read slowly, inviting the Holy Spirit to help you reflect and asking Him to open the ears of your Heart to listen to God.

2. *Meditatio* (Meditation)

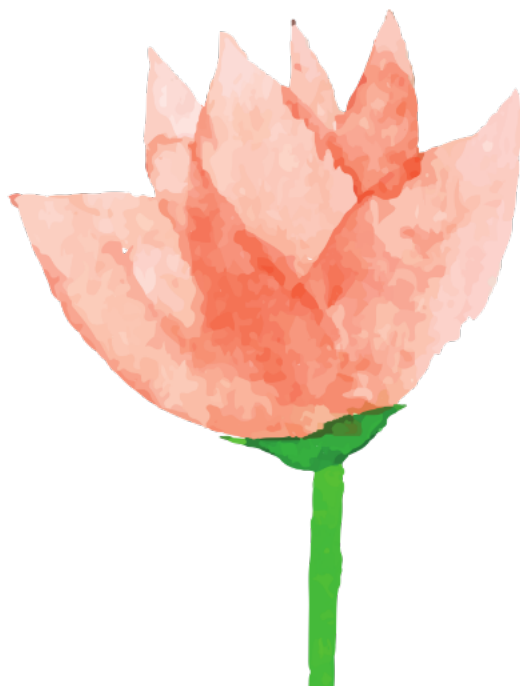
Reflect what you are reading and see how you can immerse yourself into the story. "Lord what do you want to communicate to my heart and life right now?" The Holy Spirit hears you and will respond!

3. *Contemplatio* (Use the gift of imagination)

Contemplate, perhaps the tender gaze of Christ from the Cross, the strong arms of the Good Shepherd, the gentleness of His reassuring voice. Write down your reflections.

4. *Oratio* (Prayer)

Enter into dialogue with God. When the mind or imagination has sparked an idea that descends to the heart, it is time to open up in prayer. Open your heart, talk to the Lord, and trust Him. He hears you and He will respond.





***“Remember the word that I said to you,  
‘Servants are not greater than their  
master.’ If they persecuted me, they  
will persecute you; if they kept my  
word, they will keep yours also.”***

JOHN 15:20, NRSV







# GOD SPEAKS TO YOU

One of the most liberating truths in life is that God who is all-sufficient and needs nothing, desires to communicate with us.

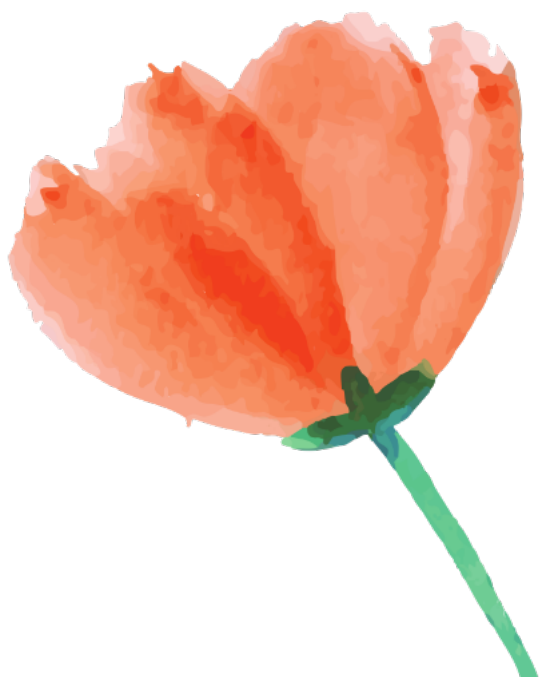
God's inexhaustible reservoir of love lies embedded in His Word. God calls us into a relationship with Him in order that we may hear His voice. Jesus said, *"My sheep hear my voice. I know them, and they follow me"* (John 10:27). The time spent with God in intimacy results in an immediate recognition of His voice. In the language of unfailing love, God teaches us to frame our world by faith, to be guided by Him and to follow His voice.

Think about our Blessed Mother Mary. She lived in a time and culture where she could have been stoned to death if news of her premarital pregnancy got out. We can only imagine the complexity of the situation. Mary had fears but her heart was at peace, because she recognized the voice of God through the angel Gabriel: *"Do not be afraid, Mary, for you have found favor with God"* (Luke 1:30). Mary recognized God's unfailing love in His Word, *"For nothing will be impossible with God"* (Luke 1:37). Mary yielded. Mary trusted Him.



St. Margaret Mary Alacoque said that in prayer, Jesus often spoke to her of the devotion to His Sacred Heart. Such manifestations of God's nearness are not restricted only to Mary or the saints. They are available to all those who desire God's Word. God longs to speak to our hearts and convince us of His love. He can fan a flame in us to love and follow Him. His Word has the power to bring us wisdom, direction, healing and freedom, far beyond anything we can ask or imagine.

It is only by faith that we can receive God's word and hear Him speaking and working in our lives. God is always calling His sheep to follow Him; God is always calling His sheep to Himself.





***“My sheep hear my voice.  
I know them, and they follow me.”***

JOHN 10:27, NRSV





# THE HOLY SPIRIT WHO SPEAKS

God speaks to us through His Holy Spirit. The Holy Spirit communicates the deep things of God to us. He guides us into all Truth.

*“When the Spirit of truth comes, He will guide you into all the truth; for He will not speak on His own, but will speak whatever He hears, and He will declare to you the things that are to come. He will glorify me, because He will take what is mine and declare it to you.” (John 16:13-14)*

Without the illumination of the Holy Spirit, the Bible is just black ink on white paper. This is why apart from the Holy Spirit, even the most disciplined students of Scripture can miss the mark and study the Word only from a purely intellectual and cognitive perspective. For the letter kills, says Saint Paul but the Spirit gives life (2 Corinthians 3:6).



The Holy Spirit is not a doctrine or denomination or optional experience reserved for only a few Christians. He is our Helper, whom the Father has sent to teach us the deep things about the Father's heart (John 14:26) and to help us draw into greater intimacy with Him. Without His active participation in our lives, the heavens would be silent, for He is the one who reveals the voice of God in our hearts.

The more we yield to the Holy Spirit, the more sensitive we become to His voice. It is this fellowship and communion with the Holy Spirit that sharpens our spiritual sensitivity and makes our hearts better able to hear the voice of the Lord when He speaks to us.





# AN INVITATION TO LISTEN

Pope Francis reminds us of the words of Saint Pope John Paul II in his Apostolic Letter *Dies Domini*, “It should also be borne in mind that the liturgical proclamation of the word of God, especially in the Eucharistic assembly, is not so much a time for meditation and catechesis as a dialogue between God and his People, a dialogue in which the wonders of salvation are proclaimed and the demands of the Covenant are continually restated.”

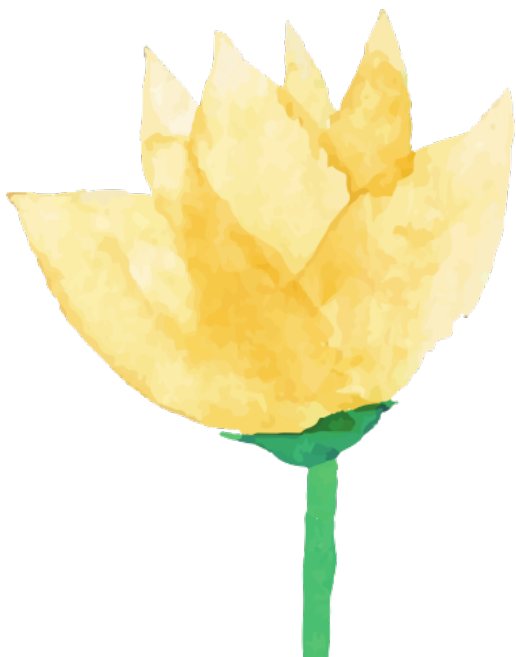
In other words, we are called to listen to the Word of God. Listening is more than hearing. Listening implies that one hears and comprehends. The Word of God must take deep root in our lives so that we can bear good fruit. It must move us beyond listening, leading us to be fully engaged in the task of making Christ known to the world by our living example.

St. Thérèse of Lisieux tells us how she listened to the voice of God. “I understand and I know from experience that: ‘The kingdom of God is within you.’ Jesus has no need of books or teachers to instruct souls; He teaches without the noise of words. Never have I heard Him speak, but I

*feel that He is within me at each moment; He is guiding and inspiring me with what I must say and do. I find just when I need them certain lights that I had not seen until then, and it isn't most frequently during my hours of prayer that these are most abundant but rather in the midst of my daily occupations."*

Jesus often used descriptive imagery to teach us the truth about listening to God's Word. In Matthew 7:24-27, He taught us that a house built on sand was very different from a house built on solid rock. The former was always susceptible to fear, anxiety and worry as the storms of life hit its foundations. There was always a possibility for its sandy foundation to slowly erode away. But a house built on solid rock had great confidence, for its foundation was steady, deep and strong able to withstand any storm.

The Word of God is our solid foundation, but it is only when we have yielded, 'listened' (heard and understood), and obeyed the Word, that we can secure our feet "solidly on a rock". Acting on the Word of God involves total obedience and surrender. It involves complete trust.





# LISTEN TO THE FATHER'S HEART

*"Indeed, the Word of God is living and active, sharper than any two-edged sword, piercing until it divides soul from spirit, joints from marrow; it is able to judge the thoughts and intentions of the heart" (Hebrews 4:12).*

*"So shall my word be that goes out from my mouth; it shall not return to me empty, but it shall accomplish that which I purpose, and succeed in the thing for which I sent it" (Isaiah 55:11).*

*"It is the Spirit that gives life; the flesh is useless. The words that I have spoken to you are spirit and life" (John 6:63).*

*"Your words were found, and I ate them, and Your words became to me a joy and the delight of my heart; for I am called by your name, O Lord, God of hosts" (Jeremiah 15:16).*

*"How sweet are Your words to my taste, sweeter than honey to my mouth!" (Psalm 119:103)*

*But he answered, "It is written, 'One does not live by bread alone, but by every word that comes from the mouth of God'" (Matthew 4:4).*





*"Like newborn infants, long for the pure, spiritual milk, so that by it you may grow into salvation." (1 Peter 2:2)*

*"Every word of God proves true; He is a shield to those who take refuge in Him." (Proverbs 30:5)*

*"Sanctify them in the truth. Your word is truth." (John 17:17)*

*"But grow in the grace and knowledge of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. To him be the glory both now and to the day of eternity. Amen" (2 Peter 3:18).*

*"Then He opened their minds to understand the Scriptures" (Luke 24:45).*

*"But the Advocate, the Holy Spirit, whom the Father will send in my name, will teach you everything, and remind you of all that I have said to you" (John 14:26).*

*"When the Spirit of truth comes, He will guide you into all the truth; for He will not speak on His own, but will speak whatever He hears, and He will declare to you the things that are to come" (John 16:13).*

*"Then Jesus said to the Jews who had believed Him, "If you continue in My word, you are truly My disciples" (John 8:31).*

*"Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly; teach and admonish one another in all wisdom; and with gratitude in your hearts sing psalms, hymns, and spiritual songs to God" (Colossians 3:16).*

*"Your word is a lamp to my feet and a light to my path" (Psalm 119:105).*

